

The logo for the National Operatic & Dramatic Association (noda) is written in a blue, cursive, lowercase font.

amateur theatre

Society : Panda Players  
Production : Shrek  
Date : 13 March 2020  
Venue : The Elgiva Theatre, Chesham  
Report by : Judith Watsham

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Show Report

Thank you for inviting me to this year's excellent production and for your warm welcome Helen, not to mention the drink. Well, you certainly just got your show completed in time! Just pity all the other companies who have had to cancel theirs after so many weeks of rehearsal too. Let us hope that they will all be able to go ahead in the future as there were some excellent potential productions out there.

Panda Players are well known for choosing shows which are slightly different - surely Shrek falls into this category, I think that the only well known number is the last one *I'm a Believer*, which, like all the ensemble numbers was very well sung.

Director and Choreographer Amber Dye showed her usual sure touch and the entire show flowed smoothly, partly due also to the well-rehearsed ensemble setting most of the scenery and props which left SM Peter Threadgold and his team free to ensure that the pace never faltered – although I am told that set changes for some of the performances earlier in the week did pose some problems for the team. Amber, the dances were all good and I thought the rat dance in particular worked very well.

Your MD, Peter Allanson, had obviously worked you all hard so all the ensemble numbers were clearly, not to mention well, sung. Roger Knight's sound ensured that the balance between the excellent small band and vocalists worked well.

Steve Urry's lighting was effective throughout.

The set, designed and built by Paul Lunnon was excellent. I loved the trees which left plenty of room for a very good puppeteer to operate some assorted hand puppets – like a large caterpillar and a squirrel. However, it was the exploding stained glass window in the Cathedral which was the most impressive! Very cleverly done and brought gasps from the audience. The interlocking pieces of wall were good but I noticed they did not seem to fit together SL as on SR – should they all have butted up tightly or were the gaps deliberate?

There is no doubt that the stars of this production were the wardrobe and make up teams. It must have been daunting to be faced with so many fairytale characters to clothe and produce so many different faces too, far more than in any pantomime which is the more usual place to find animals, fairies, witches and dragons!. Little touches, such as the donkey's shoes, which looked curved like hooves and the dragon's lit wings just made the show. Helen Turner, Janice Suter, Frances Newman, Kay Lockie, Margaret Bowden, Karen Middleton and Patricia Ould must have worked incredibly hard to produce costumes of such a high standard. Also, Several of the cast had make up changes too which must have kept Nikky

Meeson, Olivia Dale, Chloe Beard and Sophie Ballard on their toes. If there was a NODA London Award for technical brilliance I think these two teams combined would be strong contenders – but, as you know, we are not taking up offers of any more awards at the moment as it is felt the Reps have enough citations to write!

Props, Rachel Samborski, Janice Suter and Martin Beard were all very good, particularly the exploding bird!

A very good programme from martiararts design – do remember to enter it for next year's programme awards, the forms are on the NODA London Website.

There were quite a lot of children in the cast – which meant double casting. For this reason I don't think it is fair to pick out any of the children, some of whom had speaking roles, except to say that all those I saw on the Friday night were very good, fully concentrating and in character throughout – as I am sure were their counterparts.

Many of the adult ensemble played several roles and you all managed what must have frequently been some very quick changes well. I think my favourites were the Three Blind Mice! I just want to add that every single one of you, not only the children, was totally in character, moving, dancing, singing and acting in the correct role. The way some of you had to switch character and costume in seconds showed off your theatrical skills.

There were just so many small roles in this show and I am reluctant to single out any in particular, but Sam Dell's squeaky voiced Pinocchio was very well played the Gingerbread Man puppet was well voiced by Abigail Currie and Emily Gilbert's Dragon was a joy to behold.

Not quite sure what Matthew Minors was doing with his puppet fox? However, the idea of the fox being chased by a sheep at one point was a good one and very amusing to behold.

Barry Dell in the title role was excellent, looming threateningly over the displaced fairytale characters before falling for the Princess. You interacted very well with Donkey and produced some superb comedy moments. Singing excellent as always Barry.

In many ways Des Fahy's Donkey was the on-stage star of the show. A very good singing voice Des, allied to a great sense of comedy timing enabled you to develop your character whilst supporting everyone else on stage. Even through the donkey hood on your costume and your lovely makeup we could see your facial expressions which told the audience so much about what your character was feeling at any time. An excellent performance from start to finish.

Kerry Middleton's Princess Fiona was another casting that worked really well and of course your singing voice and acting ability all added so much to your characterisation. You too have a good sense of comedy timing – very well played.

I was a tad worried about the state of Kevin Vaughan-Smith's knees in his Lord Farquaad costume though – or did you have knee pads to help? I hope so, had there been even the smallest pin on the stage you would have felt it! You managed your costume so well, especially when exiting with your little legs 'walking' and your cloak billowing over your own lower legs! A great singing voice too.

The finale was so energetic, after the pace you had kept up too. The whole show was well played throughout from everyone concerned. A magical performance. Very well done.

Let us just hope that we all keep well and that the Pandas can keep on putting on shows of this calibre in whatever the future holds.

Judith Watsham  
NODA London Regional Rep Districts 11 and 11A